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ABSTRACT

Stated positively, the experienced foreign teacher of English comes to the United States to improve his English teaching abilities. Stated negatively, he comes, more often than not, to retrain rather than expand, to correct faulty language skills and improper or non-productive teaching practices. Identified here are some of the major problem areas (1) concerning these students: lack of high and continuing motivation, heavy burden of investment and unrealistic expectation on the part of the government or other funding agencies, divergency in styles of learning or teaching, culture conflict in changed role as student; and (2) concerning the programs offered at American universities: nonrelationship between theory discussed in teacher-training program and actual practice in the skills courses, poor skills course sequencing, lack of opportunity to observe and evaluate model techniques, overemphasis on course content, lack of designs and techniques for the implementation of new ideas. The author feels that influential American universities could do more for their graduates in developing supportive facilities which would carry the impressive weight of their resources and knowledge back to the graduates' own countries. (AMM)

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TESOL DEGREE PROGRAMS FOR EXPERIENCED ENGLISH TEACHERS FROM ABROAD

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Foreword

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TESOL DEGREE PROGRAMS FOR EXPERIENCED ENGLISH TEACHERS FROM ABROAD

To state it positively, the experienced foreign teacher of English comes to the United States to expand his English teaching abilities, to build his English language skills and his professional experience into a solid but elegant fortress to withstand the eroding onslaughts of his linguistically barbaric students. To put it more realistically, he comes to "improve" his English teaching abilities. To state it negatively, he comes more often than not, to retrain rather than expand, to correct faulty language skills and improper or nonproductive teaching practices.

It is much easier to build with virgin materials than with used bricks, old doors, a cracked foundation, and rotten lumber. In theory, it is much easier to shape the inexperienced student into a model teacher than to retrain an experienced teacher. Many of us must work with both the inexperienced and the experienced foreign English teachers. The latter as students require different attention to their needs. What follows is an attempt to identify some of the major problem areas--areas requiring decisions--as we reflect on the nature of the students and the programs offered at American universities.

STUDENTS

1. Many of the foreign English teachers entering advanced degree programs in the U.S. are not highly motivated toward the study of the English language or language pedagogy. There is not much extrinsic reward, after all, for teaching

English either at home or abroad. English teaching, or teaching in general, may be a respectable position, but it is seldom a profitable one. Especially in the developing countries of the world, from which many of our students come, positions in the classroom are frequently inferior, requiring less talent and offering lower pay. Also in these countries, success tends to be measured not so much in the personal satisfaction one gets from his work or his life style, but in the external material rewards. Students gravitate toward study which prepares them for more remunerative careers in medicine, science, law, and engineering. Some who are not able to pursue these studies, having already perhaps invested several years in the study of English, decide to become English teachers.

English study and teaching does for some lead to further training in the U.S. The hope of a scholarship and travel abroad may serve as the motivation toward English teaching. But without the committment to the scholarly study of the English language for its own sake, the glow from achieving the goal of study usually wears off at about midterm of the first semester.

2. Students who enter our teacher-training programs from the less developed countries carry a heavy burden of investment and expectations on the part of their governments or other funding agencies. It costs an enormous number of scarce dollars to send the students to us. Expectations for their success in our programs and their subsequent contribution to their own countries are also enormous. Such expectations put our programs in the unbearable position of certifying that the money has been well spent. They put the students in the impossible position of living up to standards that are often unrealistic and inhuman.

The pragmatic evaluation of the effectiveness of English programs at the national level is whether they work in facilitating the learning of other subjects.

There is no way, nevertheless, of answering how much English will make one successful as a Chinese lawyer, an Arab businessman, an Indian jet pilot, a Japanese politician, or a Kuwaiti elementary principal. Yet, more than any other teacher in countries with developing educational systems which use English as an educational medium, the English teachers and the English programs are judged in terms of the success students have in mastering their school subjects.

The TESOL profession has, unfortunately, assumed the role of judge too often, but in many instances it has been thrust upon us. There is no way that we can equate English verbal success (assuming we can even measure it) with success in a particular academic discipline or in a particular academic institution. We can, and do too often, speculate on probable success based on generalized samples. We cannot predict with certainty that Miss Chae, with a TOEFL score of 550 and one semester of English 102, will complete the MA degree in library science and return to Korea to become a successful librarian. We should not give ourselves the task, but such predictions are often expected and evaluations of a program or institution based on the success of a graduate in his chosen profession.

3. We should, on the other hand, expect an English teacher-training program to raise the level of performance of its graduates. The tasks assigned the graduate, however, upon his return home may be beyond his English skills abilities and his professional training. Where educated talent is at a premium, the competent or skilled worker is often moved to a position of more responsibility. This frequently works to the disadvantage of a program if the worker does not have training for that position. The experienced English teacher is a case in point.

Many of the foreign English teachers who enter our programs are classroom teachers of some few years experience. They have exhibited promise in their schools through skills in the classroom, enthusiasm for teaching students, and some demonstrated academic talent. Their potential contribution to the educational system of their country has been judged high. The decision to invest in their personal and professional development has been made in terms of their probable contribution in the future.

There are two vastly different views of the teacher, however, by those who most directly influence the teacher's life. His instructors, when he arrives in the U.S., generally view him first of all as a student, second as a teacher who is trying to become a better teacher through improved skills and understanding, eventually returning home to do a better job in his old position. His superiors, when he returns home, view him as a professionally competent teacher who has received additional expert training which equips him for a higher position, not his position as a classroom teacher.

The teacher may view himself from either of these positions but it makes little difference ultimately since he will, in more cases than not, be given a position of considerably more power and status than before. This means that much of his training has not specifically confronted the problems he will then face as an English teacher at a higher level, a supervisor or principal, a teacher-trainer, or perhaps a position entirely outside the field of English.

4. One of the characteristics of experienced teachers is that they know what questions they want answered, and they want definite and specific answers. Both American elementary and secondary language arts teachers and foreign English teachers who return for graduate work after some teaching experience are insistant in their requests for help in solving classroom problems. These

problems may stem from inadequate knowledge, for example in understanding new developments in modern grammatical description, or they may stem from the frustration of trying to teach a particular linguistic item or skill. In any case, the experienced teacher wants specific answers--the latest linguistic knowledge, the newest methods and technology of teaching--which will correct his inadequacies in the classroom.

American graduate degree programs, however, are notorious in avoiding rigid answers. A part of what it means to be a graduate student is to explore all sides, weigh the evidence from all research, evaluate alternatives. Statements are constantly challenged through additional research or experimentation. This questioning leaves many students, especially those from somewhat authoritarian educational backgrounds, with the uncomfortable feeling that the experts they have so eagerly sought are avoiding the problems or, even worse, do not know any answers.

The latter is perhaps the case. The areas of controversy within the disciplines of linguistics and language pedagogy frustrate the best of us. Many of our courses do focus on this controversy, or on problems of theory and concept. Ideally, what we are attempting to do is educate the student for change, to accept the nature of a changing discipline along with a changing world. Obviously, this never satisfactorily answers the very real concerns of the students who ask such questions as "How much pattern practice <u>is</u> valuable?" or "How <u>can</u> I teach 45 students in a class since I have no power to reduce the number to 20?"

5. Traditional teacher-training programs in the U.S. are conceived within an educational philosophy which results in the introduction of a broad theoretical framework as a first step in the training. To this theoretical skeleton students add training in the specifics of an area, and finally make practical application

of these specifics to particular teaching problems or situations. Language study provides one example of such a program continuum. Students learn general principles of language, e.g., language changes, go on to specific study of these changes in a language, and finally explore the possibility of implementing this principle in the curriculum or in the classroom.

This perhaps works well for students who reach this stage of their training with an American cultural-educational heritage. Teachers from a different culture--particularly students from the emerging nations of non-Western tradition--come to teacher-training with an entirely different set of educational experiences. They often must begin teacher-training before sufficient skills in the content have been mastered. Their traditional education does not encourage making generalizations from facts and information. Learning is by rote memorization. Teachers are bound to a textbook or lecture notes; students are, therefore, encouraged little to question or discuss. As a consequence, students often neither understand the underlying theory of a discipline, the general principles of a subject, nor the specific application to teaching.

6. The students who come with near native speaker ability are rare in our programs. Some of the reasons have already been discussed, but a further one can be offered. Three or four years' experience in teaching beginning English in Peru does not necessarily extend the teacher's ability. Quite the contrary, while it may enable them to speak easily in the patterns of book one and book two, it has done nothing to enable the teachers to go beyond that in their own language growth. With inadequate time outside the classroom and an unstimulating English language environment, the teachers' skills may, in fact, decline.

The necessity of carrying out a graduate teacher-training program in the English language medium, nonetheless, requires a high level of English proficiency. How high this level of proficiency should be is really no easier to determine for

students in TESOL teacher-training programs than it is to determine for engineers or doctors. Proficiency here relates only to the students' ability to grasp the concepts of our discipline and demonstrate in English that they have mastered the principles built into the curriculum.

An additional expectation on the part of most instructors is that the students must be able to demonstrate high proficiency in English simply because they are students and teachers of English. Even if the students assure us they will return to Thailand and Taiwan to teach first-year English classes, we feel the awarding of a master's degree in TESOL carries with it the requirement of high performance in the use of English.

In many of our programs we expend enormous amounts of time, energy, and usually someone's money, to increase the students' productive skills so that they will not be an embarrassment when they speak before the local ladies' clubs, participate in campus events, or write letters to various offices. We want their skills in English, since they represent our programs, to be better than those of other foreign students.

This attitude toward the individual student is frequently the greatest cultural shock he experiences--more than the food in the dormitory, more than high prices, and even more than X-rated movies. He has, after all, demonstrated enough English ability to be selected by his colleagues and superiors; he has been tested in English and admitted to an important American university. But upon his arrival he is often again tested and told he must enroll in further English skills courses which probably do not count toward his degree. He has not only changed status from professional to student, he has been labeled an ignoramus in the exact area in which he has had the most success up to this point.

As a further blow, he is put into a skills program which requently makes no allowance for his age, experience, or maturity, but forces him to practice

language drills which carry the concept load appropriate for seven-to twelve-year-olds. He can grasp intellectually the necessity for such practice, but he cannot accept emotionally that a great university can offer nothing more stimulating than little dialogues on shopping at the supermarket, reading exercises about Miles Standish and John Alden, and compositions on his first impressions of dorm life.

PROGRAMS

7. It would seem from what has so far been said that the student and his experiences as an English teacher cause most of the problems. Certain aspects of the teacher-training program itself, however, also cause problems.

One adjunct to most teacher-training programs is a sequence of English language skills courses. These sometimes operate independently from the teacher-training program and have no administrative or philosophical relationship to it, but in many instances the students must take a portion of the sequence in order to improve their own English skills. At best, these courses may be exemplary in their material, methods, and personnel, reflecting the soundest of current theory and practice in TESOL. At worst, they bear no evidence of a relationship between sound theory discussed in the teacher-training program and actual practice in the skills courses; staffed by instructors sometimes of less experience than the students, employing materials and methods ill-suited to the mature adult, they founder along under the critical scrutiny of the teacher-trainer. The very skills courses which the student must undergo, perhaps the only examples of TESOL he will observe, undermine the foundation one attempts to build in the training program.

There are many factors which contribute to a poor skills sequence, especially in smaller programs; they are extremely expensive for the individual student and for the university, usually requiring expensive laboratory equipment, small

classes, many contact hours, and irregular scheduling based on student needs. The courses are costly to the student in terms of money, but also in time taken away from his other academic pursuits. While he is enrolled in six hours of skills work he must delay perhaps two of his professional courses. All this calls into question an otherwise useful relationship between skills courses and teacher-training courses.

8. If the skills courses the student may be asked to observe or participate in are less than ideal, it is imperative that the teacher-trainer have the opportunity to observe effective classroom practices somewhere. Yet many teacher-training programs provide little or no practicum for the student to observe model techniques nor extend his teaching abilities through new understanding.

There is an obvious need for student experiences which clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of certain methods, materials, curricula, and administrative structures. Segments of preservice training programs as well as short-term and long-term inservice training programs should be demonstrable. Students should be able to observe dynamic programs and model practices in operation. Students should be able to evaluate, through observation and practice, which set of materials works better with beginners, which methods are successful with large groups, what kind of a workshop is most effective with inexperienced teachers, and so on. The facilities for providing these experiences are very rare in TESOL teacher-training programs.

9. Even if such facilities, laboratory or other university and community resources, were available for teacher-training programs, it is not certain how much of this activity would be valuable for the experienced teacher working for a graduate degree. Hours spent in such activities take students away from the

acquisition of the more "scholarly" base for his profession.

The need felt to maintain the academic integrity of the TESOL teacher-training programs which grant a master's degree, or other advanced degree, has led to an overemphasis on content--the content most often being theoretical linguistics. In order to insure that the program has substance, the student is expected to demonstrate outstanding abilities in at least two areas: theoretical studies and practical applications. And this performance is often in a language not the student's own.

10. Teacher-training programs, with the overall goal to upgrade the teaching of English throughout the world, do little for the graduate after he has left the university. Understandably, resources for continuing support of the graduate upon his return home are rarely available. It is doubtful, however, that the individual graduate from even the best conceived and operated teacher-training program can single-handedly initiate much change in a school system.

Experience in working with American teachers in the public schools would indicate that the most enthusiastic and progressive teacher soon grows weary without the support of colleagues or supervisors of similar training or inclination. Yet the graduate foreign teacher is usually sent back to his home with a diploma and a handshake and little else but his own confident authority to reshape English language instruction in his country.

Designs and techniques for the implementation of new ideas, sometimes amounting to radical innovations, should be a part of the teacher-training program. Innovations in the teaching of English may require educational change in general, but without massive support the individual graduate may have little chance of using his recently acquired abilities. Influential American universities could do more for their graduates, perhaps, in developing supportive facilities

which would carry the impressive weight of their resources and knowledge back to the graduates' own countries.

Numbers of universities throughout the United States now offer advanced degree programs with a major emphasis on teaching English to speakers of other languages. Whatever administrative umbrella these programs fall under, whatever their philosophical rationale and social motives, they share certain unresolved problems in training the experienced English teacher from abroad. These have been identified as problems arising from the nature of the student and from the nature of the teacher-training programs. These problem areas, provided the right decisions are made, could become the strengths of a teacher-training program which sees its goal as the development of quality English instruction and the education of quality English teachers.